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Educational Philosophy

My educational philosophy has largely been defined by my own experiences as a student, and has been heavily refined since becoming a UMF student. A constant throughout my life has always been my love to learn new things, and I want to translate that love for learning into my lessons, and inspire my students to always be exploring the world around them, and growing as individuals. Looking back on my time in primary and secondary education, it was largely an enjoyable experience for me, although it was not without its difficulties. I know that each of my students will be facing their own set of challenges as well, whether academic, social, emotional, or otherwise, and I want to equip them with the tools and supports they need to overcome their challenges and be successful in life. Not all students will have the same needs, but all students will benefit from a teacher who is supportive and caring, while also being transparent about expectations, and holding students to those expectations. I also believe that teachers should be modeling to students what it means to be a responsible adult and global citizen. I still have many areas in which I'm growing, but it is that belief which helps me hold myself to higher standards, and improve as an individual. Learning about new ideas and perspectives is what allows people to evaluate their lives and their surroundings, and I want to motivate my students to be thoughtful individuals, who are always striving to improve themselves, their communities, and their world.

The content area I will teach is English, but at its core English is a medium to communicate ideas, and better understand the world we live in. The written word has and will always be a way to share one's thoughts, so by studying English we are studying a way to understand every content area that life has to offer. With that being said, the most authentic way to explore English is to do so while also exploring ideas from science, mathematics, social studies, and topics that are relevant to my student's life experiences. This may sound hyperbolic, but I truly believe that the possibilities of what you can teach students through English are limitless. Among the infinite things English can teach, some of the major things it should teach students in schools are how to be empathetic, reflective, informed, critical and creative. I believe those skills can prepare a student to be successful in the quickly changing world we live in. As with any content area, I feel that it's important for students to know why the content is relevant to them, and how it effects their lives, so I want my students to understand how studying English benefits them, no matter what their future career and life choices will be. In my classes I want to teach English with a contagious enthusiasm. I love English and I want my students to love English as well. But as I've said before, all content areas are connected, so no matter what disciplines enter my English lessons, I want to approach every one with appreciation and excitement. Not all disciplines come as naturally to me as English has, but I don't want to bring my past frustrations with a subject into the classroom, and I don't want to display any bias to my students. All subject areas are equally valuable, but not all students will enjoy them equally. In my English classes I want to help my students see the value in every discipline, and help them apply their strengths to their areas of weakness, and grow as well-rounded individuals.

As I've said already, English is essentially a platform to share ideas, so in teaching English I want my students sharing their thoughts and communicating with one another as much as possible. As a student I greatly enjoyed classes that favored discussion, not only because I could share my own thoughts (which I admittedly am very fond of) but also because of the new ideas that came from my classmates, which would then propel my own thought process. I want to present my students with a variety of viewpoints through the texts I choose for the class to focus on, but I also want my students to understand the variety of viewpoints held by their own classmates. Having a full class discussion is one way to achieve that goal, but I know that not all students feel as comfortable speaking their ideas to the class, and not all students will be able to quickly form their thoughts into an oral response. Because of those limitations to discussion, I will be utilizing many ways to check in with students, and throughout my lessons I will provide my students with frequent opportunities to respond, in a variety of formats, so I can get a more accurate representation of what they are thinking, learning, and retaining from my lessons. It's also my belief that quality and effective teaching occurs when students feel respected and supported by their teachers. I feel strongly that education should be a learner-based process, and teachers are responsible for supporting and directing that learning to meet meaningful goals. To that end, I want to structure my assignments and classwork to offer students choice, while still maintaining a path to the learning goals I have set for them. One of the most important lessons I want to impart on my students is that learning does not start and end when they walk into a classroom, but occupies every corner of their lives. There is a set of skills and knowledge I am responsible for imparting on my students, but I want my students to see how those skills and

knowledge can contribute to accomplishing their goals outside of school, and that I support those endeavors.

Before coming to UMF my only intention was to teach in a high school, but since my time in Farmington I've realized that the age group I teach matters little to me. Being in such a large community of future educators has helped me see the exciting possibilities of teaching students at different stages in their lives. It's important to be aware that the needs and challenges facing students at different ages and in different demographics can shift wildly, but I find excitement in that variety, and in the impact a quality educator can have on the many notable stages of development in a student's life. In the first few days of my practicum experience at Mt. Blue Middle School I quickly found that my preconceived notions of the strange, confused, and insecure early adolescents were superficial at best. Yes, those students are going through tremendous changes during this stage, but they also have many strengths and areas of competence, which can be said of students at any age. My passion for an integrated, student-centered curriculum has also contributed to my consideration of teaching different grade levels, because of the many possibilities available at each level. Co-teaching is an exciting concept to me, although many of the structures to support co-teaching are stronger in lower levels. In general there are also more opportunities to cross-disciplines, and coordinate with other teachers at the middle level and lower. In my career I can even see myself eventually teaching at an elementary level because of the ability to craft projects that require many skills, from multiple disciplines, and because of the time that can be given to students to complete such assignments. But no matter the level I teach, I will always be doing what I can to incorporate other content

areas into my lessons, while learning about the interests, strengths, and areas that require growth in my students, and encouraging and challenging them appropriately.

There is no doubt that my philosophy of education has been effected by my mother's careers in education and childcare. My mother was a special educator until the birth of my eldest sister, which prompted her to open her own daycare. So, being the youngest of three, and having my mom run a daycare and summer camps since before I was born, has meant that I've had near constant social interaction for my entire life. I wouldn't say I'm naturally extroverted, but that childhood environment strongly contributed to the development of my social and conflict management skills. My parents' value of education also meant that I was provided with an abundance of resources, including books, and educational toys. Some of the most influential toys I was fortunate enough to have access to were Legos. Creating with Legos combined components of mathematics, engineering, design, and storytelling all in the context of play. Without even being aware of their effect, Legos set the foundation for me behind the idea that learning is fun, and that there are many ways to accomplish your goals. Legos have contributed to my views surrounding an integrated curriculum, and have taught me that making mistakes can lead to better understanding, and improvement.

Another life experience that has greatly effected me as an individual, and subsequently my educational philosophy, was the suicide of a close friend at the age of ten. The years after his death were challenging for many reasons, but since that time I've grown much more aware and concerned for the wellbeing of others. Adolescent suicide is an enormous and far too common tragedy in our society, and as an educator it is important to me that my students know I care deeply about each and every one of them. I pray that I will never have to experience one of my

students taking their own life, and I will do everything in my power to prevent that from happening. Unfortunately, I am not all powerful, and currently the statistical probability of a student committing suicide is distressingly high. For that reason I want to make sure my students are fully aware that I am available if they need someone to talk to, and that life is always worth living.

Among the many things I've learned at UMF that have shaped my philosophy, two of the most notable are the Universal Design for Learning, and Understanding by Design. I hadn't heard of either of these frameworks before coming to UMF, but once I had I was immediately convinced that all teachers should be using these approaches to plan their lessons. Learning about Understanding by Design taught me the importance of always knowing what the end goal is that you want your students to achieve. Following that process of backwards planning is the best way to ensure your students can reach the goals expected of them. Having said that, I also know that inspiration for a great lesson can happen at any time, and I don't think teachers should restrict themselves if a lesson comes to them before the learning goal does, but I think it's essential that teachers figure out what learning goal that lesson is leading to before they use it in a class. I also strongly agree with the usage of differentiated instruction and Understanding by Design to help craft lessons that are responsive to the variation among the interests and abilities of my students. Presenting information through a variety of formats is one of the best ways to reach all students, and give them a more well rounded understanding of material. When it comes to reviewing student work, I don't think you can get an accurate understanding of what they know, if you don't give students some choice in how they represent their knowledge. Not doing so would equate to the classic metaphor of asking a monkey and a fish to climb a tree. The

abilities, thought processes and interests in a class vary widely from student to student. That does not mean we need to move the goalposts for our students, but we do need to allow each of them to hit the target in their own way, and make sure they have the tools to do so.

One current issue in education that I'm sure to face, if one can even call it an issue, is the debate surrounding proficiency based education. I am strongly in favor of assessing students based on their proficiency for many reasons, but a large part of it is because I think it cuts down a lot of the vague differentiations between letter grades, not to mention the fact that the bottom half of a hundred point grading scale is virtually meaningless. By having clearly defined learning goals students better understand what they are working towards, and with specific feedback on summative and formative assessments, students can easily see what they did to accomplish a goal, or what they still need to accomplish to reach it. I think the largest challenge of implementing a proficiency based system is having parents understand why it is beneficial. For the students I think it can eliminate the extrinsic motivation/demotivation of letter grades, while fostering a growth mindset that is intrinsically motivated. Another major issue I see in education is the implementation of school discipline in the form of detentions, suspensions and expulsions. In my opinion, expulsions and out of school suspensions should be used only in the most extreme of circumstances, but today they are widely overused. There is lots of data to support the existence of a school to prison pipeline, that disproportionately effects people of color, which I find morally unacceptable in a so-called modern society. The purpose of a school is to equally prepare all students for success, so if there is evidence that a significant percentage of students are being conditioned for incarceration, there needs to be an immediate and drastic change in discipline practices. I believe that the solution can be found in restorative justice, which favors

the discussion of the effects and consequences of one's actions over the blind or poorly explained discipline of detentions and the like. As I've learned in my Special Education classes at UMF, all behavior is communication, and restorative justice aims to help students communicate their thoughts and emotions productively, instead of in ways that can negatively impact themselves and others. Restorative justice does not excuse students from discipline, but rather creates just consequences, and encourages students to make better choices in the future.

There are many aspects of my philosophy that have been developing throughout my life, but which I have fairly recently learned are core beliefs of the Humanist and Constructivist philosophies. For example, since first learning about citations in middle school I started to realize that all information is learned, and influenced by one's life. This belief is at the core of Constructivism, which posits that what humans learn, and the way they create meaning, is affected by each individual's experiences and thought processes. The ideas of Constructivism have supported my views that learning should be an active process for students, because it is the results of those processes that create meaning, and knowledge without meaning is difficult to apply purposefully. By having students work through concepts, rather than explaining them outright, creates long-term understanding, and can also create a shared experience in the classroom with which other lessons can be built upon. I also agree with the aspects of Humanism that support human agency and self-actualization. There are many powerful systems that exist today that may produce cynicism in humans about the control they have over their lives, but Humanism promotes the notion that through logic and ingenuity, humans can work to improve their lives, and change the world for the better. Not only do I agree with this sentiment, but I feel it is absolutely necessary to hold this belief if humanity hopes to improve. If someone does not

believe they can achieve a goal, it is highly unlikely that they will stumble into achievement. It is incredibly important to me that my students believe they can create change, because that is the only way change will come.

It is my belief that the core processes of teaching should involve the presentation of knowledge, the guidance of student logic, and the modeling of being a responsible adult. Students will have varying levels of background knowledge, but in school there will be times that all students need a base of knowledge to accomplish a task, and it is the teacher's duty to provide that knowledge. In terms of creating meaning from that knowledge, it is the teacher's job to craft lessons that will guide students to that meaning, while not doing so for them. Students need to be active in that process or the lessons will not be long-lasting. I also believe teachers are accountable for preparing students for adulthood, and to do so teachers should model what it means to be a productive, ethical and responsible adult.

When looking at my actual classroom and the layout of my lessons, I think structure and clear expectations are very beneficial to student performance. Because of that, I want to establish concise expectations of classroom conduct, and I want to create a balance of routine and creativity in my lessons. For example, I'd like to have established activities and tools such as interactive journals, that students know how to use, but that will have different objectives for each entry. For my classroom layout I want the seating arranged so that students can easily see each other and the front of the room. I also want the space easily maneuverable for my students and myself, not only to accommodate any potential students with disabilities, but also so I can use my proximity to students to assist them, or refocus them. It's also important for me to have a positive learning environment, which to me means a supportive and non-judgmental space, in

which students should feel comfortable to express their thoughts, and make mistakes. It's my belief that the fear of being wrong is one of the greatest inhibitors to ingenuity and creative thinking, so I will encourage my students to take risks, and not fear failure, because when they occur, failures are learning opportunities, and steps in the road to success. With that in mind, I also believe in giving students opportunities to improve poor grades in a structured manner that focuses on students displaying proficiency. In some cases that may take the form of students making improvements to existing assignments, but it could also involve other assessments agreed upon by the student and I. I also believe in finding ways to incorporate technology into my curriculum that allow students to accomplish tasks that otherwise would not be possible, and also improves students' technological literacy. With the rapid advancements in technology occurring today, we educators need to anticipate the technology of the future and prepare students for the changes to come by using technology meaningfully in our lessons.

I hope to impact my future school district by promoting and improving the communication between educators, and by doing what I can to create a unified and positive school community. If I want to truly create a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment for my students that extends beyond my classroom, I need to ensure that mentality is held by educators at a school and district wide level. I also aspire to teach in a community that values service learning and project based learning, and I want to work with my school and district to find ways that the students can achieve learning goals, while making tangible improvements to their school and community. Another prominent goal of mine in education is to help my students to adopt a growth mindset. Future generations (and current generations) need to approach challenges with the belief that a solution can always be found. At this stage in my

career, my philosophy is largely theoretical, but I will always be working to improve my educational practices, and promoting those best practices to every educator I know. The future of humanity depends on education, and I intend to work with my fellow educators to help create a better world.